

April 6

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WATERLOO - Politicians and military leaders Monday hailed the \$12 million in renovations to the Iowa Army National Guard's aviation facilities on West Big Rock Road as a commitment to soldiers and the Cedar Valley.

The pilots, mechanics and other military personnel who work at the post say it means so much more. The expanded hangar, repair and education areas will help them do their jobs more efficiently - making the state and country a safer place.

A rededication ceremony was held for the Waterloo Aviation Readiness Center and Army Aviation Support Facility #2, home to five Air Guard detachments and area counter drug operations. Originally built in 1972 just northeast of the Waterloo Regional Airport, officials said more space was needed to house and maintain helicopters and train soldiers.

U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley of Waterloo said two experiences come to mind why taxpayers got their money's worth: The 2008 floods and a recent trip to Iraq.

Not only are Guard troops regularly being activated for military duty - all 180 soldiers training at the facility have been called up during the past three years - but they assist locally during natural disasters and other state emergencies.

Braley said the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency came to the Aviation Readiness Center and inspected local flood damage by air. Sixty-five soldiers of Detachment 1,

Company C, 2nd Battalion, 211th General Support Aviation Battalion - with a air medical evacuation mission - are the latest to return from a year on active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. They got back in July.

"That's why spending money on facilities like these in times of war and peace are so important," Braley said.

Larson Construction of Independence was the general contractor.